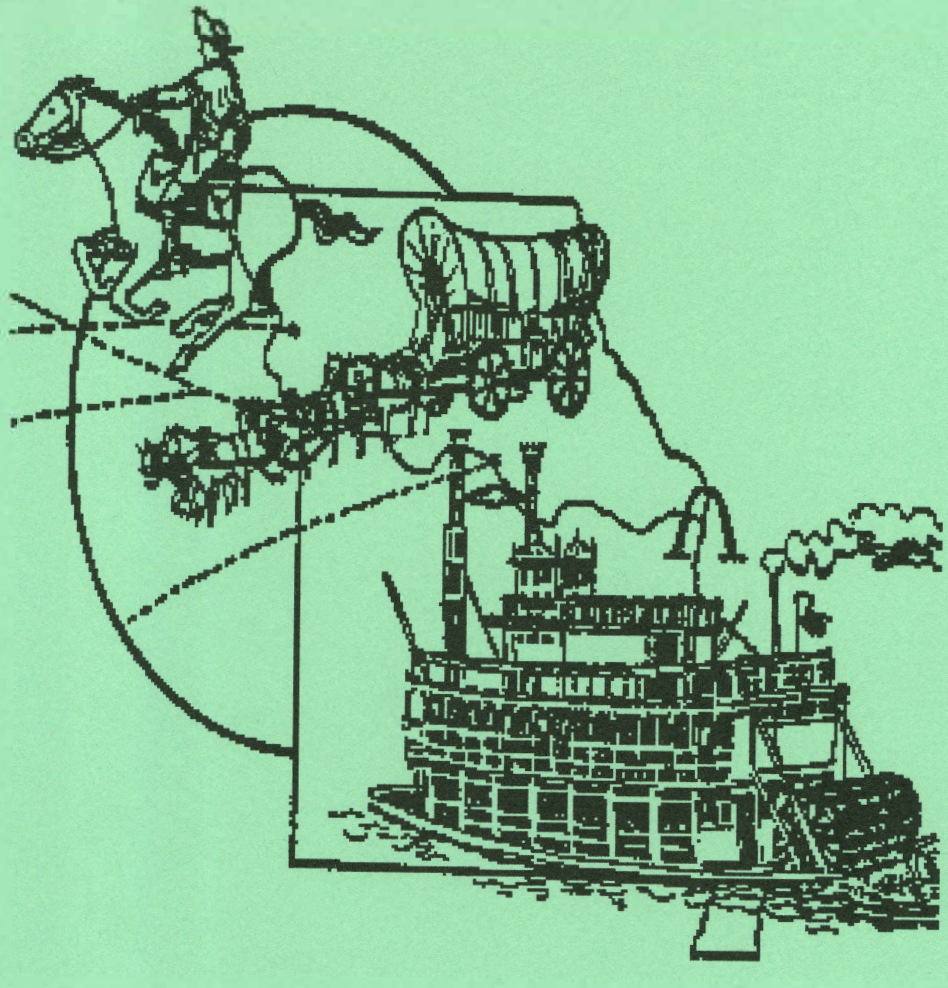

Toward The Setting Sun

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TOWARD THE SETTING SUN

The Historical Journal of the Missouri Conference

The United Methodist Church

Volume 13, Number 2 *Spring, 2015*

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FROM THE EDITOR

In 1939, the General Conference met in Kansas City. That was the occasion of the uniting conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church South, and the Methodist Protestant Church. They left more than one bit of unfinished business to be taken care of by the regular General Conference of 1940. In 1970, an adjourned session of the General Conference met in St. Louis to finish the unfinished business from the 1968 General Conference. That conference had seen the merger with the Evangelical United Brethren Church, and the final steps in the dissolution of the Central Jurisdiction of the Methodist Church. Both those actions had left unfinished a great deal of business, including equitable pensions, equitable salaries, open itineracy, and a host of other items. The Journal of the 1970 General Conference has page after page of items in committee reports that had been left over from 1968.

In 1970 the unfinished issues settled in a constellation around issues of racism and social justice. The late '60s had seen waves of protests, some of them violent, around matters of racial equality. The Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR) brought to the General Conference a list of recommendations, almost demands for dealing with inequality in the church. Because of the justice issues, the 1970 General Conference was as significant in its own way as the one in 1939. In both cases, the results of the General Conference would mean that the "people called Methodist" would never be the same again.

This issue of *Toward the Setting Sun* looks at the 1970 General Conference and the issues with which it dealt. The results were not all that anyone had hoped for, but some progress toward justice was made. The fact that the Conference was held in St. Louis makes it an important part of our history, and hence an important part of the work of this journal.

As I worked on this issue, I could not help thinking, we haven't really changed much. We still have the same divisions, the same failure to take seriously the calls for justice and equality. We even have the same refusal of conferences outside the United States to refuse to accept actions of the conference if those actions don't suit them. The presenting issues are different, but the dynamics are, unfortunately, the same.

OK, that's as close to "editorializing" as I'm going to come. Read this issue and think for yourself about the realities of the church in 1970 and in 2015.

On a happier note, we continue to look for essays into the history of the followers of John Wesley in Missouri. If you have an idea that you'd like to develop and see in print, let me know and I'll be happy to work with you. If you have an idea but don't feel confident about researching and writing, let me know that, too, and I'll try to find a writer who will see it through.

Be in touch with me at jogooch@aol.com, or by telephone at 816-347-9505.

John O. Gooch, Ph.D., Editor

"MEET ME IN ST. LOUIS"
THE 1970 GENERAL CONFERENCE

John O. Gooch
(Stephanie Moore and Elizabeth Terry also contributed to this essay.)

The 1970 General Conference was a special "adjourned" session to complete the business of the regular conference of 1968. The conference of 1968 had finalized the merger with the Evangelical United Brethren, and had voted to end the Central Jurisdiction. Both decisions of that conference meant that changes in relationships and appointments were necessary. The 1970 "adjourned" session was to complete the work of 1968 in 5 days. The conference met at Kiel Auditorium in St. Louis, Missouri, beginning April 20, 1974. This article will review briefly the work of that conference which dealt primarily with questions of race relations.

Many of us will recall the racial crises of the 1960s, which form the background for the events of the General Conference. Some of the most critical were

- August 11, 1965 - There were four days of rioting in the Watts area of Los Angeles, California. There were 34 dead and hundreds injured in those riots. There was also $35 million in property damage, a sum that would be much larger in today's dollars. But the greatest damage from the riots was the realization driven home to a nation thinking that we were making progress on racial issues that the racial crisis was as critical in the North as in the South.

- Summer, 1966 - Racial violence in Chicago and Cleveland caused 7 deaths and led the governors to call out the National Guard to contain the violence. There were a total of 43 riots and civil disorders across the nation during the summer.

- Summer 1967 - Newark, New Jersey, and Detroit became bywords for the nation's racial crisis. The writer was one of 5 adults who were leading the

Missouri East Conference Missionary Tour for youth through some of America's inner cities. We happened to leave Detroit the day before the riots broke out, so Detroit was seared on the consciousness of a busload of Missouri Methodist youth and adults.

- March, 1968 - The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (also known as the Cerner Commission) issued a report warning of the growth toward two separate societies in the United States. The report called white racism the major cause of urban problems.

- April 4, 1968 - The assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in Memphis, Tennessee. The shooting brought both sadness and anger across America.

- Spring, 1968 - The General Conference of the Methodist Church voted to try to raise a $20 million Fund for Reconciliation.

- June, 1968 - The assassination of Robert F. Kennedy on the night he won the Democratic Presidential Primary in California, heightened tensions and sadness all across the nation.

- Summer 1968 - The Poor People's campaign in Washington, D.C. called for jobs, housing, education, and medical care for the poor of all races. There was no significant response from either the public or the private sector. One can only imagine the frustration and rage that this caused among the poor and their advocates.

- October 1968 - U.S. sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos, both African-Americans, medaled in the 200 meters at the Olympics in Mexico City. On the medal podium, they raised their fists in what became known as the "black power salute" while the Star Spangled Banner was played. This act created anger on both sides of the racial divide.

- April 25-27, 1969 - Some six hundred African-Americans of widely diverse backgrounds gathered in Detroit for the (National) Black Economic

Development Conference. Many different views were expressed. James Forman presented the Black Manifesto, which was approved by a vote of 187 to 65.

- May, 1969 - James Forman confronts various denominational bodies with demands for "reparations" to compensate blacks for their enslavement and subsequent injustices of racial discrimination. An ongoing organization, called the Black Economic Development Conference (BEDC) was set up to implement the demands of the Black Manifesto and administer a 10-point program of economic development, ranging from Southern land banks to a black-controlled communications network. They asked for $500 million in reparations from white churches and synagogues. These demands would be echoed in the call from Black Methodists for Church Renewal at the 1970 General Conference. The communications network called for establishing black-owned newspapers and audio-visual stations. The manifesto also called for disruptions of selected church agencies until their demands were met, and for sit-ins at selected churches. It was this call for sit-ins that would have a powerful emotional impact on the 1970 General Conference.

AND SO IT BEGINS

Ironically, when the demonstrations began, they seemed to have no connection to the tense racial issue surrounding the conference. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reported in its April 20 issue that services were disrupted at Centenary United Methodist Church. Centenary is located near downtown and was host to some 15-20 bishops of the church for morning worship. The demonstrators interrupted the service and asked to be heard. Dr. J. Lester McGee, the pastor of Centenary, refused their request and terminated the worship service because of the disruption. Twenty-three persons were arrested and booked on suspicion of disrupting a religious service. All those arrested were white. Dr. McGee said he thought the demonstrations were a dress

rehearsal for disruption of the General Conference.[1] The *Kansas City Times* quoted Dr. McGee calling the demonstrators "a group of very extreme, radical, wild-eyed young people."[2] In a related incident, Bishop John Wesley Lord reported that a council of bishops meeting on Saturday had been interrupted by Black Methodist Young Adult Task Force members. (Note: it is not clear what group is being meant here.) He said that some 40 demonstrators lined the walls of the room where the bishops were meeting and blocked doorways. There was some jostling and two elderly bishops from India were slightly bruised. Bishop Eugene Frank, the host bishop told reporters: "We are going into this conference as normally as possible – if any group has anything legitimate to say we are trying to find channels for them to say it."[3] So even before the conference began, delegates and visitors were braced for demonstrations and trouble. Lost in all the confusion caused by these weekend events was the appearance at Bishop Frank's press conference of a group calling itself Good News? This is the conservative evangelical wing of the Church, and, so far as we can determine, it was their first appearance on the national scene.

At the opening session of the Conference, Robert W. Moon, of the California-Nevada Conference made the following statement and motion. "Mr. Chairman, we understand that certain officers of this body have been notified of the presence, here, of certain officers from the Justice Department; therefore I would like to ask that we submit this motion at this time: That we affirm that this General Conference has not asked for the presence here of representatives of the FBI or other agents of that Justice Department, that we do not desire their presence among us, that we do not need them here for any of our purposes."[4] Apparently, the federal agents were present because of fears of disruption of the conference by what were called "renewalist groups." Since those groups included Black United Methodists for Church Renewal and the Council on Youth Ministry, delegates seemed confident that they could handle any situation which arose within the church structure itself. Mr. Moon's motion was referred to the

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[1] "Services Are Disrupted at Centenary Methodist," in *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* April 20, 1970, p. 3A
[2] Mary Hobbs, "Arrest Youths Inside Church," *The Kansas City Times,* April 20, 1970. p. 12
[3] Ibid
[4] Journal of the 1970 General Conference of the United Methodist Church, p. 225

Committee on Rules. There is confusion and uncertainty, even in the Journal, as to whether or not he later withdrew his motion.

Other business of the first day included items left over from the 1968 General Conference. One was what to name the hymnal of the new church. Like most issues of "substance" at United Methodist gatherings, the discussion on this issue occupied several hours of the Conference time. Another was the mandate for a study of the Social Principles, which had been referred to a special commission. Apparently the authorization for the study was ambiguous enough that the commission wasn't sure how to proceed and they were asking for guidance from the Conference. The Theological Commission on Doctrine and Doctrinal Standards reported on the anti-Catholic words in the Articles of Religion and stated they intended to keep most of them because of historical reasons, but to re-interpret them in light of ecumenism in the modern world.[5] These items were among those "left over" from 1968 and were disposed of relatively quickly. The focus of the Conference would then move to questions of racism and social justice.

THE FOCUS

Then the issues of racism and justice came to the fore-front. Bishop W. Kenneth Goodson and Rev. Joseph E. Lowery brought the report of the Commission on Religion and Race. The question of the merger of the Central Jurisdiction had left much unfinished and the Commission's report addressed those unfinished issues directly. Rev. Lowery said "Among these is the concern about too little realization of the need, particularly in merged conferences, for programming directed to a ministry to a black community. Serious questions are being raised concerning the commitment and effectiveness of new conferences to speak to and respond to the needs peculiar to the black community. Question is being raised about black representation on boards, agencies, and committees and boards of trustees of Conference Institutions."[6] Those questions seemed particularly relevant to the Missouri conferences, in the memory of this writer. Black representation on boards, etc., was a process that moved slowly, simply by the nature of the nominating process. Special ministries were a concern that

[5] Daily Christian Advocate, General Conference, St. Louis, MO. 1970. Volume II, No. 3, April 21, 1970
[6] Journal of the 1970 General Conference, p. 232

spoke to a different (and deeper) level of understanding and commitment. One assumes that this would be true in merged conferences all across the church.

Rev. Lowery continued the report: "In light of the critical nature of race relations within United Methodism and consistent with the commitment of the church that United Methodist Church become a more authentically inclusive church, it is the recommendation of the Commission on Religion and Race to the General Conference.."[7] Then followed a series of recommendations which will be summarized here.

First, the Commission recommended a series of programs, workshops and other forms of dialogue on racism, to be instituted immediately. This was suggested so that black and white United Methodists could begin to relate on a more "meaningful and honest level." Second, the Commission recommended that, in all pending merger negotiations, adequate black representation on all agencies and boards of the conference would be guaranteed for at least three quadrennia following the merger. Third, the Commission recognized that the need for Black District Superintendents could not be ignored. This was true for several reasons. It would provide a perspective that would enhance the effectiveness of ministry to black United Methodists. It would provide the opportunity for black people to identify with the church leadership. And, perhaps most important, it would provide the black constituency of the church a voice in determining their own destiny. Therefore, it was important that Black superintendents be appointed in all the merged conferences. Fourth, the bishops should reaffirm their commitment to inclusiveness and open itinerancy for all pastors in the conference. Fifth, that each newly merged conference would evaluate its program of ministry to the Black constituency and membership of the conference, and provide meaningful support and programs for the Black community. This would include economic development as well as missions, evangelism, and other traditional programs. Sixth, and finally, all the institutions of the former Central Jurisdiction would receive financial support at least on a level with that provided for institutions of former white conferences.

The Commission moved that this part of its report be referred to the Legislative Committee on Conferences. We will return to it later in this paper. At this point in the

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[7] Ibid

Conference, the questions of equal treatment for the races and social justice were squarely in front of the delegates. But there was more yet to come.

The Commission also raised the issue of pension support for members of the former Central Jurisdiction. Those pensions were in many, if not most, cases lower than in the former white conferences. The Temporary General Aid Fund, based on apportionment, had been established to provide support for merged conferences to equalize pensions for all ministers. This was a simple matter of justice. The proposed resolutions from the Commission recommended some adjustments in the amount of support to the merged conferences. The adjustments would not change the amount of support or the goals for equality, but would change the pace at which such support would decrease. With some technical discussion the matter was referred to the Committee on Conferences.

Rev. Joseph Lowery then presented two final resolutions from the Commission. He reminded the conference that the Commission on Religion and Race is charged to coordinate denominational support for prophetic ministries for racial and social justice. He stated that "today, economic injustice stands as the most grievous of the inequities. Unemployment, underemployment, lack of investment opportunities still plague members of minority communities. Hunger still plagues families across this nation."[8] Then, "the Commission on Religion and Race calls upon the General Conference to reorder the priorities of this United Methodist Church so that substantially more funds be made available for economic empowerment and development of minority groups."[9]

Some 45 years later, many of the same problems plague the church and the larger society of our nation today. As the economy recovers from the Great Recession, unemployment, under-employment, hunger, still plague a great many in our society. This is particularly true among minority groups. Has the church failed in its calling for social justice? Or have we been over-whelmed by economic and political injustice to the extent that we are almost powerless to bring about change? Have we learned from our history? Or have we learned but become increasingly powerless in the economic and political realms?

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[8] Journal, p. 236
[9] Ibid. p. 237

The final resolution from the Commission dealt with the fact that some United Methodist churches and their educational facilities were being used to establish all-white private schools in an attempt to circumvent the Supreme Court rulings on desegregation. The resolution first stated that such use of church property for such purposes is in violation of the policy of the United Methodist Church on race. The Constitution of the church (Article IV) states that the Body of Christ is open to all races, colors, national origins, or economic conditions. Then came the specific recommendations. First that the bishops and district superintendents communicate with the churches that are being used for all-white public schools and remind them they are in violation of United Methodist Church policy and law. They ask the bishops to be clear that they will fully support pastors in urging congregations to follow such policy, including support for pastors who "exercise their authority under paragraph 1536 of the *Discipline*...to prevent the use of church property for such school activities."[10] The resolution asked the General Conference to declare that segregated schools on church property were in violation of the church's Constitution and support appropriate legal action to end such schools on church property.

The resolution was referred to the Legislative Committee on Christian Social Concerns. Already on the first day, the issue of social justice in regard to race was clearly on the table in terms of financial support for pensions, segregated schools operating in church property, and full participation of Blacks in conference boards and agencies. The stage was set for what would prove to be the defining moment of the conference.

BLACK METHODISTS FOR CHURCH RENEWAL

Delegates indicated they had been waiting for this moment, with some apprehension, some anxiety, and even a little fear. The disruption and arrests at Centenary Church on Sunday increased that anxiety. Now the crucial moment of the conference had arrived, with the proposals from Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR). Ernest Teagle of the Southern Illinois Conference moved for a suspension of the rules to allow members of BMCR and their friends to be present during the report,

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[10]Loc. Cit.

and that delegates could have permission to go to the doors and greet them as brothers and sisters in Christ. This was granted. The members of Black Methodists for Church Renewal (roughly 300 persons) circled the auditorium. They sang a freedom song and then stood silently during the rest of the session. In spite of the emphasis on love involved with the demonstration, this writer remembers delegates talking about how they were frightened that there might be demonstrations, perhaps even violent ones, during the presentation. That this did not occur is a testimony to the living out of the emphasis on love, even as some hard words were spoken.

The Rev. James Lawson presented the report. Here we will present only the five recommendations in the report. The report itself is so important that it is printed in full in Appendix A, following this article. The first recommendation was that the general boards and agencies of the church re-prioritize so that 25% of the World Service Dollar (some $22 million) be remitted annually to Black Methodists for Church Renewal to undergird the concept of self-determination. Dr. Earle Wilson, vice-chairman of BMCR, was quoted as saying that decision-making in minority and poor communities "can best be done by those who are involved and not by those in absentia." [11]The amount should not be less than $5,000,000

The second recommendation was that the entire balance of the amounts pledged to the Fund for Reconciliation be given to Black Methodists for Church Renewal to be used for economic development in poverty pockets in America. Again, the amount should not be less than $5,000,000.

The third recommendation was an annual guarantee of at least $10,000,000 to the twelve black Methodist colleges.

The fourth recommendation was that a million dollar scholarship and loan fund be set up for minority high school seniors, so that children of low-income families would have a greater chance at higher education. The fund would be administered by the black Methodist colleges.

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[11] Reported by Mary Hobbs, "Church Hears Black Needs," The Kansas City Times, April 22, 1970, p. 14A

Fifth, a minimum quota of 30% black representation on all general boards and agencies of the church and an equal percentage of black voting delegates to all the conferences (annual, jurisdictional, and general) of the church.

Lawson then presented a rationale for those recommendations, which deserves to be read in full (see Appendix A). On motion, each of the recommendations was referred to the appropriate committee of the Conference, including World Service and Finance.

The *Post-Dispatch* reported, along with its coverage of this session that Centenary United Methodist Church had decided to press charges against 23 persons who had been arrested Sunday while disrupting services at that church.[12]

IN THE MEANTIME

While the legislative committees were working on responses to the recommendations of the Black Methodists for Church Renewal, the General Conference dealt with other issues. One of the first was an agreement to stay a participant in the Consultation for Church Union (COCU). COCU was an attempt to draw together some 25,000,000 American Protestants into the Church of Christ Uniting. The discussion made clear that the action did not indicate either approval or disapproval of the plan, but simply a decision on the part of the church to study the work of COCU and to participate in the perfection of the COCU plan. The Conference also rejected petitions that the United Methodist Church withdraw from the National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches.[13]

On the 23rd of April, the conference went on record as favoring legalized abortion and sterilization as a partial solution to the population crisis. Debate on this issue lasted for several hours. (Note: this was 3 years before the Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade* legalized abortion in the United States.) The criterion for abortion would

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[12] Charles Bunce, "Methodist Church Conference Welcomes Delegation of Blacks," *St. Louis Post Dispatch,* April 22, 1970, p. 3B

[13] Charles Bunce, "Methodists Agree To Stay in Church Merger," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* April 23, 1970, p.2D

be "that it be available only upon the request of the person most directly concerned – which would be the pregnant woman."[14]

The resolution also stated that individuals should be given the right to decide his or her own sterilization. One assumes that this refers to such actions as vasectomies, tubal ligations, and similar procedures. The rationale for the resolution was the crisis of exploding populations. The resolution said "The quality of our lives is increasingly threatened as the exploding population growth places staggering burdens upon societies unable to solve even their present growth problems." [15] Note that the resolution said nothing about actions beyond personal voluntary choice. This was not a sweeping resolution aimed at the forced sterilization of large populations. Rather, it was an attempt to give moral undergirding for individuals who chose one of the methods of sterilization available to them. In a humorous sidelight to the debate on this resolution, some delegates objected to the amount of time being spent on this subject. The Rev. Benjamin Garrison of Urbana, Illinois, reminded them that the day before they had spent several hours in deciding whether the new hymnal should be published in one cover or two![16] Such is the "flow" of debate in church bodies!

When the votes were taken on the proposals from Black Methodists for Church Renewal (after lengthy debate that stretched most of the last day of the conference), the conference voted to commit more than $23,000.000 to the support of minority self-determination and education over the next two years. The breakdown was $2,000,000 annually to be administered by the Commission on Religion and Race. Four million annually was voted for support of black Methodist colleges. This money would come through the Race Relations offering. The Worldwide Communion offering would fund $500,000 annually for scholarship grants, and a higher-education loan fund of $10,000,000 would be made available to minority groups in the church through the board of education. United Methodist boards and agencies have about $100,000,000 in

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[14] Charles Bunce, "Methodists Back Legal Abortion," *St Louis Post-Dispatch,* April 24, 1970 See also Mary Hobbs, "Church Stand on Abortions," *The Kansas City Star,* April 24, 1970,
[15] Bunce, *loc. cit*
[16] Bunce, *loc. cit.*

invested funds and 10 percent of this would be made available to the board of education through loans.[17]

The recommendations from BMCR had asked for more money, but most members seemed satisfied with the results of the conference's actions. Rev. James Lawson, President of the group said, "This is a good first step for the United Methodist Church as it seeks to relate to minority self-determination."[18] Bishop John Wesley Lord, president of the Council of Bishops, said "The conference that no one wanted has become the conference in which God has spoken to his people. We were reminded earlier in our sessions that wherever you read in the New Testament, if you keep on reading, you will be in trouble. We kept on reading and we have been in trouble but it was God's trouble. God has been speaking and we have been listening and learning and what was his word, in obedience to Christ, the church has declared its mission to stand with the poor and powerless, the alienated, the young, in the struggle to obtain justice, to gain power and to exercise meaningful options in all matters affecting their lives."[19]

The ultimate results of the conference's actions never quite reached the lofty goals that Bishop Lord spoke of, but the church made considerable strides forward in terms of empowering minority groups (not just blacks) in its membership. One far-reaching action that received little notice at the time, but proved to be an important part of renewal, was the passage of a constitutional amendment that guaranteed that 2 youth from each district would be made voting members of the annual conference.

A last-minute "sour note" was the action of the delegates from Europe who read into the record their disassociation from the resolution approving legalized abortion and voluntary sterilization. (The ability of conferences outside the United States to decide which actions of the conference they will support and which they will ignore continues to be a major issue in the church. *Editor)*

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[17] "Methodists Vote Aid For Minority Groups," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* April 25, 1970, p. 1
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 7
[19] *Journal of the 1970 General Conference,* p. 340

APPENDIX A

BLACK METHODISTS FOR CHURCH RENEWAL, INC.

Renewal Through the Redistribution of Power

The founding assumptions of Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR) were very optimistic, since each of them pre-supposed that the life style and mission of the Methodist Church could be renewed. BMCR, itself, was born as a black coalition of churchmen amidst the increasing progressive legislative actions of the Methodist Church, a denomination intentionally trying to heal and reconcile itself. Once it became evident that the Church was seeking to phase out the segregated structures of the Central Jurisdiction, BMCR came to be convinced that the Church had to face a deeper aspect of the racial crisis. Black Methodists knew well that minor belated structural changes would not remedy the causes of the racism which created segregated structures in the first place. The Church simply has to acknowledge the fact that no integrationist schemed can effect reconciliation as long as black people remain poor and powerless. The Methodist Church has sought merely a superficial unity devoid of a new commitment to undertake a massive redistribution of power.

Because our Church has failed to be a model for other institutions as they relate to people of color, at home and abroad, the development of a black caucus, BMCR, was inevitable. It has become clear to so-called minority groups that their lot will not be improved substantially until they seize control of their future. Thus, black Methodists created BMCR as a means of communicating the new self-image and mood of the black community to the Church. BMCR was designed to serve as an arena for black Methodists, interested in the potential of the Church, to express collectively common concerns, to evaluate critically themselves together with their Church and to plan new ways for the Church to implement programs of social justice and empowerment for the poor, alienated, and oppressed.

Historical Perspective

However much the Church might deny it, black Methodists have had a peculiar history within the Church. From the very beginning John Wesley considered the black

man as a heathen. Wesley's attitude is reflected in his notorious retort to scoffers as he baptized the first black Methodists, African slaves, in London, "Shall not God in His own time have these heathen for His inheritance?" Black Methodists in America have repeatedly insisted that the time to be identified as God's inheritance has always been ignored by the Church. At times, the Methodist disposition toward blacks was so cruel that thousands of blacks abandoned the Methodist Church, forming their own black denomination. Yet, despite the harsh discriminatory pattern, there was always a small remnant of blacks who refused to leave the Church in the belief that a so-called Christian structure could move beyond its racism.

The black Methodists who remained within the denomination witness many of their own black brothers, who had established separate denominations, imitate many of the worst features of their predominantly white parent structure. These separate black churches even used white inspired missionary materials in their evangelism programs for oppressed people of color abroad. Gradually, the black Methodists who remained in the Methodist Church began to see that his task was not to leave, but to transform the Church utilizing its resources for a new sense of mission to black people. Unfortunately, even many white churchmen who saw the legitimacy of this task for the black Methodist resented the idea of giving up power and control to black people. There persists today an expression of this feeling among white Methodists who accused BMCR of being a separatist organization. Such persistent efforts by whites to delegitimize BMCR can only be seen as another manifestation of the sentiment that it would be best for all parties concerned if there were a massive black exodus from the Church.

The resulting dilemma facing the black Methodists who remain within the denomination today is clear, "How can so few transform so many?" This is not only the painful dilemma of the black Methodists, but it also represents the central riddle of the Christian gospel. Christianity of the New Testament Church has always been a minority movement, that is, a few people dedicated to remove the sight of extreme poverty and humiliation. This then is the legacy inherited by the black church, which today must affirm the possibility of one person with eyes saving ninety-nine persons without eyes. Thus, when black Methodists sent out the call for its first nation meeting in 1968, there

was a distinct feeling that a few truly committed churchmen could indeed change, radically, the style of mission by redefining the priorities of the church and by insisting upon the implementation of those new priorities for mission.

BMCR and Self-Determination

BMCR now represents the black Methodist attempt to endorse self-determination as a working principle for the United Methodist Church as it confronts itself in relation to minority groups. Self-determination refers to the process of oppressed ethnic groups defining themselves and their world in terms of their real needs and aspirations. This process obviously requires empowerment which must mean making unprecedented resources available to such groups to implement a wide variety of new ministries and programs.

Any ethnic group serious about self-determination knows full that it is not an easy thing. Having been in a submissive and dependent relationship so long without power, minority groups now seek empowerment as the prerequisite to equality. Minority groups want the full responsibility involved, for we are clearly saying that we have long ago come of age. Indeed, it has been out of a desperate effort to communicate this idea to the general church that BMCR has agitated and demonstrated, urging the Church to change some of its clearly racist policies, to sell properties, liquidate some investments and trim agency budgets for a massive black controlled fund for new programs in the black community. We insist that our Church can do this.

Black Methodists for Church Renewal has recognized that the Church has too often exploited grass roots people. The Church has spoken continually to the spiritual needs of the oppressed without expressing a parallel interest in meeting their basic needs for food, jobs, housing and self-respecting identity. The Church can only correct this unfortunate situation by trusting minority groups enough to place under their control sufficient resources to change their existing power relation to the dominant group upon whom minorities have been made dependent.

In every jurisdiction of the Church, black Methodists must be empowered to create community controlled businesses, vocational training centers, unions for laborers and other self-help projects. It is impossible to underestimate the important role which

the local black Methodist Church, with adequate resources, can play in the reconciling work of God. Within the framework of black empowerment, BMCR could easily become the instrument to implement the following vital programs:

Community Action

Within the black community there has been a distinct absence of adequate funds for *Legal Aid and Bonding* for black people in the urban north and rural south. Organizations such as the N.A.A.C.P., S.C.L.C., and the American Civil Liberties Union have had only marginal success in combating many of the subtle forms of racist brutality committed against black people in a society where the legal system tends to accommodate white Americans much more readily than minority groups. The poor often face police reprisals and court injustices simply because they have no financial resources or legal counsel made available to them. Many blacks feel that the Church has done little in the past to correct these circumstances.

Large numbers of community projects staffed by minority group people and designed to organize communities around a wide variety of concerns quickly fold up due to limited resources. Hundreds of requests for aid come from these projects each week to such organizations like the *Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO)*. Oddly enough, IFCO has not received the kind of financial support from the respective denominations which would enable it to respond to the critical needs of many community projects.

A great number of uninvolved churchmen have applauded advocates of the movement for social justice. As men like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. have led in the movement for social change, churchmen and their denominational structures have permitted the struggle for human rights and dignity to be waged with meager funds and token support. Because of this, the Church must carry a heavy burden of guilt today in not providing tangible support for direct community action, the Church has contributed to the death of those engaged in doing the Church's work. This indictment certainly weighs heavily upon the United Methodist Church, which has yet to demonstrate a will to destroy all forms of poverty, disenfranchisement, and racism. It appears that only of the most convincing ways the Church could regain a degree of

credibility in the black community would be to emphasize the importance of the Church emersing (*sic*) herself in programs of direct community action. The United Methodist Church must use every available resource to stimulate a new style of mission for minority groups.

Economic Development

Economic Development presupposed a redistribution of wealth and resources to enable a greater number of subsistence or poverty level people to increase, substantially, their income. Economic development properly implemented for minority groups should increase the earning capability and the buying potential of people. The chief aim of the economic development is to generate a surplus of income over a period of time beyond temporary capital transfers to effect a generalized distribution in economic welfare. Put simply, black economic development means increasing, substantially, the standard of living for black people.

Because raising the standard of living can be done in so many exploitative ways, black economic development refers to a particular kind of economic endeavor for black people today. Thus the primary concern of black people has been to endorse economic programs which are of broad benefit to the black community rather than to individual black entrepreneurs. Black economic development in a positive approach lifts up cooperative businesses or enterprises which are controlled by the community. Few blacks find themselves able to endorse the continued proliferation of "Mom and Pop" stores still being underwritten by many underwriters of black capitalism.

Clearly, no sincere effort to support economic development for minority groups could begin on any other premise than the need to make available massive sums as a large base of working capital for the minority group to control. If black people are to think seriously about land acquisition for cooperative farms and housing, vocational training or managerial assistance programs, wholesale distributorships and cooperative supermarkets, large amounts of capital are necessary. The problem has not been the availability of black expertise and leadership in the area of economics or business. The problem has neither been the potential of the economic market in the black community nor the absence of new ideas. The single obstacle to black economic development has

been the scarcity of resources and funds which could become working capital for black people to control.

At a time when the Federal Government has all but announced publicly its intention to disregard the basic needs of minority groups and poor Americans, the Church has an opportunity to assume a new level of moral leadership. It has been left to the Church to carry the heavy responsibility of financing creative models designed to empower black people to serve each other better.

Among the ventures which BMCR might launch are the following:

I. Direct sponsorship by individuals or coalitions of black Methodist Churches of housing developments and nursing homes for black elderly persons. BMCR might provide seed money to generate federal funds.

II. Establishment of regional business enterprises with production, wholesale, distribution and retail outlet components all managed and controlled by the black community.

III. Community service enterprises such as consumer education programs, selective buying campaign, credit unions, health and day care centers.

IV. Lending assistance programs for secular projects administered through local black Methodist churches.

V. Training programs in the building trades together with land purchases for farm and supermarket cooperatives for the black community.

Education

BMCR has an abiding concern for the twelve black schools, colleges and universities founded by the Methodist Church. These schools have never received more than symbolic financial support from the Church. As a result, these black institutions have not been able to provide the kind of quality education which well-paid faculty and staff, excellent classroom, library, or laboratory facilities would allow. The average family income of these schools is beneath the national subsistence level, suggesting that these institutions can hardly rely upon increased tuitions and student fees for additional income. Church neglect has all but forced some of these schools to consider

consolidation or dissolution. One of the most dramatic instances is the situation of Rust College in Holly Springs, Mississippi, where a Methodist college in existence over one hundred years is still unaccredited and cannot, therefore, qualify for any foundation aid. Only recently has the Church indicated a willingness to raise emergency for the black Methodist institutions of higher education. This new willingness "to help," however, has not moved beyond token support.

The United Methodist Church cannot escape its own moral responsibility to make a massive compensation for the years of neglecting its black Methodist schools and colleges. The current operating needs of these colleges and universities from Church resources exceeds ten million dollars, a most figures when compared with the operating budgets of several of the predominantly white universities, such as American University, Southern Methodist University, or Emory University. Through greater church support of these schools, far more black students could be recruited with scholarships or loan aid and provided with a higher quality of education.

The General Conference must more swiftly to guarantee these black institutions of annual recurring commitments totaling over ten million dollars in an effort to stabilize the fiscal management of these institutions. For too long, the Methodist Church has denied its heavy responsibility to these black Methodist institutions which still produce a great percentage of black professional leadership for the church and society.

Black Empowerment Within The Life of the Church

A long standing issue among black Methodists has been the inadequate percentage of black representation at the highest decision-making levels of the Church. While it is a fact that the black constituency of the United Methodist Church represents only 6% of the estimated eleven million members, an institution which professes to be in business for the oppressed, the humiliated and the poor, must be compelled to share equally with such persons, black people, its full power.

Today, this can only mean that the United Methodist Church must place a minimum of 30% of black representatives on each board or agency of the Church. In addition, the United Methodist Church must guarantee that an equal percentage of

black voting representatives be elected to all jurisdictional and general conferences of the Church. We, Christians, have to recognize that a concentrated redistribution of power has to take place if serious empowerment of estranged groups is to be established as the duty of the Christian Church today. The conditions of impoverished and oppressed people cannot be altered if the Church itself is not prepared to act on its own self-sacrificial theology. Whites must give up power and control, if blacks and other minorities are to have any.

The United Methodist Church is not wealthy, especially when compared with the holdings of the Catholic Church or those of the Southern Baptists. Despite this, it is an inescapable fact that the United Methodist Church is the second largest Protestant denomination in America and often professes to have the most progressive attitude among the denominations on social policies. The most appropriate question becomes, "What power does the United Methodist Church have to lead in the area of creative social change?" Unfortunately, the Methodist form of Christian does not want to answer honestly the question, for there are over 40,000 local United Methodist Churches in America which have a combined unencumbered property worth of nearly five billion dollars ($5,000,000,000.00). The combined assets of just two of the denomination's major general boards approaches one billion dollars ($1,000,000,000.00). By totaling other miscellaneous properties owned wholly or in part by some corporation or agency of the Church, both in the United States and abroad, the amount becomes even more impressive.

Turning to an illustrative case in point of the Church's irresponsible use of the little wealth that it controls, the Methodist Corporation currently holds a choice piece of property in Washington, D.C., adjoining the American University campus. This property was recently appraised at $1.5 million dollars. As tragic as it is, the extent of the Church's imagination for the use of this property has not gone beyond building a National Methodist Shrine for the Church. Such scandalous instances as this compel minority groups to petition the Church with alternative ways of disestablishing itself for the sake of minority groups.

A Call to Repentance

Black Methodists for Church Renewal calls upon the Special Session of the 1970 General Conference to repent publically its traditional neglect of the black community's need for empowerment for social justice as well as economic development. Every delegate is urged to repudiate the overt and subtle racism of the Church which has permitted this pattern of neglect. Furthermore, each delegation to the General Conference is asked to press for the immediate implementation of the following symbolic but corrective recommendations:

I. An immediate reordering of priorities for the general boards and agencies of the United Methodist Church to the extent that twenty-five percent (25%) of the *World Service Dollar* ($22,268,424.00) be remitted annually to Black Methodists for Church Renewal in order to undergird, further, the concept of self-determination. The amount being not less than five and one-half million ($5,500,000.00).

II. The designation of the entire balance of the amounts subscribed to our pledge to the *Fund for Reconciliation* including the two million dollars ($2,000,000.00) earmarked for the restoration of Vietnam when that immoral war is over, to Black Methodists for Church Renewal for economic development in poverty pockets of America. The amount here being not less than five million dollars ($5,000,000.00).

III. An annual guarantee of not less than ten million dollars ($10,000,000.00) to the twelve black Methodist institutions of higher education to strengthen these Church inspired schools to compete favorably with the best institutions of higher education in America.

IV. A million dollar scholarship and loan fund for minority group high school seniors to provide a greater chance for children of low income families to acquire a higher education. This fund would be administered by the twelve black Methodist colleges.

V. A minimum quota of thirty percent (30%) black representation on all general boards and agencies of the United Methodist Church and an

equal percentage of black voting delegates to all annual, jurisdictional and general conferences of the United Methodist Church.

Black Methodists for Church Renewal, Inc.
Officers
February 1970 – 1971

Chairman	Rev. James Lawson, Memphis, Tenn. Vice
Chairman	Dr. Earle Wilson, Atlanta, Georgia
Secretary	Rev. Hamilton Boswell, San Francisco,
California Asst. Secretary	Mrs. Thelma Barnes, Greenville, Miss.
Treasurer	Mr. Robert Palmer, Sumter, South Carolina

APPENDIX B

Missouri Delegates to the 1970 General Conference

Missouri East

Clergy	Laity
Wesley Hager	J. Clinton Hawkins
Monk Bryan	Mrs. Edward Brandhorst
Floyd Brower	Mrs. Sara Clardy
Gregory Poole	Oscar Schupp
J.J. Johnson	Mrs. Margaret Sonnenday

Missouri West

Lyman Firestone	
Forrest Standard	Mrs. Norton Brown
Charles McEowen	Mrs. Ernest Mehl
C. Jarrett Gray	Guy Hall
Hauser Winter	Kenneth Hart
C.H. Crandall	Ernest Mehl